

VZCZCXRO3935
RR RUEHIK RUEHYG
DE RUEHFR #1146/01 0821412
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 231412Z MAR 07 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5903
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEHMRE/AMCONSUL MARSEILLE 1607
RUEHSR/AMCONSUL STRASBOURG 0369

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001146

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/PPD, EUR/WE, INR, R

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: WEEKLY MEDIA WRAP-UP: MISSILE DEFENSE; IRAQ--FOUR YEAR
ANNIVERSARY; PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN; LE MONDE COVERAGE OF SARKOZY.
MARCH 23, 2007.

PARIS 00001146 001.2 OF 002

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Most media outlets portrayed the issue of U.S. missile defense installations in the Czech Republic and Poland as splitting Europe on its 50th anniversary. The four year anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq was also cause for reflection on the status of the conflict and the U.S. troop surge strategy. The presidential campaign and President Chirac's official announcement of support for UMP candidate Nicolas Sarkozy dominated domestic election news. End Summary.

MISSILE DEFENSE AND "NEW EUROPE"

¶2. (SBU) In the weekend edition of right-of-center Le Figaro (March 17-18) Isabelle Lasserre wrote that "Washington defends its anti-missile shield." Lasserre's report, based on DOD U/S Edelman and LTG Obering's March 16 Paris press briefing, highlighted Obering and Edelman's assurances that the American plan for a missile shield "will not spark a new arms race." An Agence France Presse wire story on March 16 emphasized "Mr. Edelman's praise for the quality of his meetings with the French Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Defense." Left-of-center Le Monde's weekend front-page story, based on its interview with Edelman, further highlighted the missile shield issue, but focused on the transparency of the U.S. consultations.

¶3. (SBU) Right-of-center Le Figaro (March 21) featured a series of articles on missile defense, underscoring that the issue is dividing "Merkel's Coalition." "The American project reenergizes divisions between old and new Europeans... France is less concerned than Germany about Russia's mood swings, but nonetheless refers to the missile defense plans as a "unilateral American initiative." Le Figaro went on to argue that former communist countries had supported the U.S. in 2003, in the face of Franco-German-Russian resistance to the 2003 Iraq invasion. According to right-of-center Le Figaro, a recent poll in Polish Rzeczpospolita shows that 51 percent of Poles are opposed to the installation of the interceptors in Poland.

¶4. (SBU) The editorial in weekly news magazine l'Express (March 22) by Christian Makarian insists that it is "time to stop commemorating treaties and... move forward... The problem of unity of the

twenty-seven is... visible today with the issue of the American missile defense shield... With a budget of 154 billion euros for defense spending, that is to say the second largest budget on the planet, the EU cannot reach operational unity. Yet the state of the world is such that a demand for an involved Europe is greater than ever."

IRAQ - FOUR YEAR ANNIVERSARY

¶5. (SBU) The editorial by Dominique Jamet in popular France Soir (March 19) comments that "The cost of this war in terms of morale is high... There is the original sin of lies to justify going into war... and there is the evidence, stronger everyday that the Iraqi people are, as they were once already, victims. First of dictatorship, now of a war... A war without an end... But today what is the most disturbing to Americans is that their president intends to send even more troops... to a place where their presence is unjustified."

¶6. (SBU) Right-of-center Le Figaro carried a prominently featured article (March 20) entitled "Four Years Later, the 'Liberators' are Trapped in Iraq." The daily suggested that Iraq is in the grips of civil war and cited civilian and coalition casualty figures to make the case that the current "surge" is sparking a "battle that is not a classical military campaign, but a struggle to stop the murders and the division of the city." Right-of-center Le Figaro's editorial, "Iraq, One War too Many," made a bleak assessment of the situation noting that "America's friends, among whom we count ourselves, do not have an easy task [these days]."

¶7. (SBU) Left-of-center Le Monde carried a series of articles on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the invasion, citing Republican "regrouping" around the President's strategy... with "figures believed to be gone from the political scene, such as Richard Perle, one of the principal architects of the war, or the former Texas Representative indicted for corruption, Tom Delay."

PARIS 00001146 002.2 OF 002

Business daily Les Echos mentioned "the patina of reconstruction four years after the American invasion," noting that the immediate relief of the Iraqis following the downfall of Hussein's particularly bloody regime has been replaced by a "profound pessimism."

¶8. (SBU) Right-of-center Le Figaro (March 21) included an article on continuing violence in the capital following the hanging of former Iraqi vice president Ramadan. Le Figaro also carried an analysis by journalist Adrien Jaulmes on "The United States' Mission Impossible: To Win the Four Wars of Iraq." According to Jaulmes, "the U.S. is starting to realize that the crisis in Iraq is no longer a simple confrontation between U.S. forces and Sunni insurgents, too simplistically labeled as terrorists... U.S. efforts to curb the Sunni insurrection against the new Shiite institutions feed the religious war, as well as the Al Qaida war, without achieving more than tactical and temporary success. Washington's attempts to include neighbor countries such as Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia in a negotiated settlement, risk having no influence at all on the Sunni insurrection and the religious war... A U.S. disengagement from Iraq, as recommended now by a majority of the U.S. Congress, would do nothing to calm down the Sunni insurgents, but this withdrawal would be welcomed by Al Qaida as a resounding victory."

CHIRAC "ANOINTS" SARKOZY

¶9. (SBU) Right-of-center Le Figaro (March 22) devoted a full page to President Chirac's "natural support" for and "anointment" of UMP candidate Sarkozy. "The Elysee opted for a formal and traditional method for the president to make his support public... The intervention was taped as opposed to live and as it was not in the form of an interview was able to sidestep embarrassing questions such as Sarkozy's desire to create an immigration ministry." The editorial in right-of-center Le Figaro (March 22) by Alexis Brezet

suggested that "of course Chirac's resentment towards Sarkozy did not magically disappear... The fact is that Sarkozy, who for a long time was a symbol of contradiction, has succeeded in rallying his camp behind him. Meanwhile the Socialist candidate continues her shilly-shallying with the Party's 'elephants.'"

LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE/RIGHT-OF-CENTER CANDIDATE

¶10. (SBU) Left-of-center Le Monde's marked lack of criticism of right-of-center presidential candidate continues as the election draws nearer. Le Monde's major shareholder, businessman Arnaud Lagardere, is a close friend of Sarkozy. Lagardere made headlines last year when he removed Alain Genestar from his position as editor of glossy weekly magazine Paris Match following Lagardere's decision to run photos of Sarkozy's (now reconciled) wife with her then-boyfriend in New York. Right-of-center Le Figaro's clearly pro-Sarkozy editorial line contrasts sharply with left-wing Liberation's pro-Royal bent, with left-of-center Le Monde leaning more toward Sarkozy than might otherwise be expected, and leaving readers of the major dailies unlikely to encounter stories or editorials that might differ from their already established political inclinations.
STAPLETON